

# What it's like in Iraq

Ryan Gressett is a sophomore at Southeast Lauderdale High School. He enjoys playing baseball. Ryan plans to pursue a career in physical therapy, sports medicine or the military. He wrote this story about his father, Staff Master Sgt. Johnny Gressett of the Mississippi Air National Guard's 183rd Airlift Squadron, homebased in Jackson.

By Ryan Gressett  
special to The Star

My dad spends time with me. Ever since I was little, he would come home from work tired and exhausted, but he still managed to spend time with me throwing the baseball or helping me hit.

I knew that is not what he wanted to do when he came home from work, but he did it to help me. Thanks to him, I am now a baseball player for the Southeast Lauderdale Tigers ...

My dad has served in Iraq, and I interviewed him about what it is like.

"One of the hardest things to get used to is their culture. Their culture is very different from ours. The crews have to be briefed on what — and what not — to do," he said.

They were taught not to raise their left palm or show the bottom of their foot because these were offensive to Middle Eastern people. For example, when Baghdad fell, the Iraqi people stomped on the statues of Saddam Hussein as a sign of disrespect.

He also said that the crew was not supposed to look any of the Middle Eastern women in the eyes.

He also mentioned how once every hour every business has to close for 10 minutes so they can pray to Allah. There are armed guards that walk around to make sure the businesses close.

After going through his experiences in the Middle East, my dad said, "I am glad to be home."



## TO OUR TROOPS

This artwork was drawn by 4-year-old Karli Bartlett, a student at Highland Baptist Church Child Development Center. Karli is the daughter of Keith and Kristy Bartlett. The children at the center were asked to draw a picture for Guardsmen, Reservists and active-duty military personnel.

ILLUSTRATION BY KARLI BARTLETT

## Bragging rights

*The Meridian Star asked, "Do you know a Guardsman, Reservist, member of the active-duty military or veteran who deserves a pat on the back?" These sophomores from Southeast Lauderdale High School answered the call and submitted "Bragging Rights" entries to "Profile 2005: A Letter from Home."*

"I want to brag on my father, Richard A. Davis Jr. because he is very patriotic and he is a wonderful person. He is a senior master sergeant in the Mississippi Air National Guard, and he is in the 186th Air Refueling Wing at Key Field in Meridian.

"He would do anything for his country, and he is very proud to be an American. He has been a part of the military for 24 years, and he has enjoyed every day of it. He also loves his family and friends like he loves his country. He enjoys making everyone around him smile. He always does everything he can to make people happy."

Brittany Davis

"I want to brag on my brother, Michael Ethridge, because he is an outstanding person who has inspired me to do my best. He is a 20-year-old who is always on the path to success, and got a 33 in math on his ACT.

"Michael has always been there for me as a true friend and a big brother, so when he joined the Army Reserves in 2002 and went overseas in 2004, my pride for him went up even more. Although I miss him with all my heart, I know he is doing what he has always wanted to by serving his country to the best of his ability. I am so proud of my big brother, and I wish him the very best."

Marissa Ethridge

"My grandfather, Carl Reed Lummus, does so much for everyone and is so generous. He joined the Army in 1958. He went to Fort Jackson for six months of active duty and he served in the Signal Corps. Also, he served in the 83rd Artillery Unit in

Meridian. In 1964, he was discharged from active reserve as a staff sergeant.

"My grandfather has a garden during the summer and grows many types of vegetables. He also has a horse and buggy. He has done so much for my family and our community. I appreciate all that my grandfather has done, and I am grateful to him."

Andrea Wilson

"I want to brag on my uncle, John Suttles, because he deserves recognition and appreciation for the sacrifices he makes. He served for his country during the Vietnam War, where he stepped on a land mine and lost his leg. He has an artificial leg to replace the one he lost and has recently found out that he may have to wear a brace on his remaining leg. He is now in his late 50's, and he spends most of his time caring for his wife ... I really admire my uncle because I think it takes a lot of mental and physical strength to live his everyday life."

Brittany Mars



## PROUD OF HER DADDY

Ashton Lampton of Decatur is a second-grade student at Newton County Elementary School. Her father, Staff Sgt. Paul Lampton of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 150th Combat Engineer Battalion in Meridian, is currently serving in Iraq. Here's what Ashton said about her picture: "I drew a picture of my daddy ... he just left for service in Iraq for the next year or so. Even though I am going to really miss him, I am very proud of my daddy for helping to defend our country."

ILLUSTRATION BY ASHTON LAMPTON



Ashton



Paul

## Iraq: Just the beginning?

*Matt Banta is a sophomore at Meridian High School. He enjoys playing the guitar and other musical instruments, and hopes to go into business or politics. Matt says he has always had a strong opinion about the U.S. War on Terror.*

By Matt Banta  
special to The Star

The war in Iraq is a very emotional subject for many people. I think it is great that

we are able to have these opinions. This is what makes this country great, the freedom of opinion. I believe that this freedom should be granted to every single person on Earth.

Any leader who does not allow his people to have this freedom, or any freedom at all, should not be a leader ...

Many people say that Iraq was not a direct threat when Saddam Hussein was in power. I do not think it matters which terrorist or dictator we eliminate from power first. Saddam Hussein did not allow his citizens to have any freedoms. I think this is a good enough motive for the United States and its

allies to help the citizens of Iraq.

After all of the fighting has stopped, and Iraq is stabilized, the United States should help another country become free ...

The ultimate goal for the United States, in my opinion, is to help the whole world know the joys of freedom. Many people, as well as I, would not want to live without our freedom. Unfortunately for other countries, their freedom can only be achieved with the help of the U.S. military.

That is why I respect and honor every single United States soldier who has put his or her life in harm's way for our freedom.

## Dear Johnny ...

*This letter was submitted by Keiosha Sanford, 12, a seventh-grader at Magnolia Middle School. She is writing to a member of her church, Johnny Wise.*

How are you doing? I'm fine. I am writing to you to let you know that I appreciate you and the other soldiers for what you are doing for our country.

I thank you for being courageous enough to fight for our freedom. This year, for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, instead of having a lock-in at the church we (went) to Atlanta to visit colleges, go out to eat and watch the parade.

I wish that you could come back to church. I wake up every day wondering are you OK and wishing you were here. When the church saw you on the front cover of the magazine, we were happy to see your face. I wish you and the other troops the best of luck and much love.



Sanford

Keiosha Sanford